



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Monday, November 5, 2007
Media Contact: Cyndi Bemis
Utah Department of Health
(o) 801-538-6348 (m) 801-550-4228

Utah 6th Healthiest State in the Nation – Again *Challenges Remain in Lack of Health Insurance, Fewer Family Doctors*

(SALT LAKE CITY) — Utah's low smoking and drinking rates, healthy babies and low cancer death rates helped land the state in 6th place again in the United Health Foundation's (UHF) 18th annual *America's Health Rankings*TM report.

Still, as Utahns get fatter and more go without health insurance, officials at the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) concede the state has plenty of work to do to stay on top.

"The UHF report is a pretty reliable tool to evaluate our efforts to keep Utahns healthy," said UDOH Executive Director Dr. David Sundwall. "It reinforces what we're doing right, and more importantly, shows where we need to improve."

The report shows a healthy increase over 2006 in the percentage of babies and toddlers who are fully immunized – pushing Utah up from 47th to 25th place in that category. Other improvements include a jump from 8th to 5th place in cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) deaths, and a low cancer death rate that puts the state in 1st place.

At the same time, obesity rates rose slightly, as did the number of children living in poverty. The state ranks near the bottom (45th) in the number of primary care physicians per capita—a problem most urgent in rural Utah—and continues to see significant increases in the number of uninsured residents. Despite this, Sundwall sees reason to believe in a healthier future.

"There is a clear link between a state's economic health and the health of its citizens," said Sundwall. "We can all be proud of Governor Jon Huntsman's efforts to improve our economy and, to the extent we can reduce the numbers of children in poverty and get health coverage for more Utahns, we will see improvements in the health of the state as a whole."

- MORE -

The UHF report praises Utah for its efforts in combating infectious disease, lowering the rates of AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis by 11 percent since 2006. And smoking rates plummeted by 15 percent as well, evidence of the success of UDOH anti-tobacco programs.

“The state of Utah is a role model in the fight against tobacco,” said William Roper, a UHF report contributor and Dean of the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. “If every state matched Utah’s low smoking rates, the total number of American smokers would be cut nearly in half – from 45 million to 25 million,” Roper added.

The UHF report indicates Utah ranks in the top 10 in 10 of the 18 determinants, including;

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Smoking deaths | 1 st (no change from 2006) |
| Cancer deaths | 1 st (no change) |
| Infant mortality | 2 nd (down from 1st) |
| Preventable hospitalizations | 2 nd (no change) |
| Prevalence of binge drinking | 3 rd (down from 1st) |
| Cardiovascular deaths | 5 th (up from 8 th) |
| Violent crime | 6 th (no change) |
| Prevalence of obesity | 8 th (no change) |
| High school graduation | 9 th (up from 14 th) |
| Infectious disease | 10 th (up from 11 th) |

There are many factors at work in Utah’s consistent top 10 ranking over the 18 years of the UHF report. “The rankings document much of the valuable work done in public health,” said Sundwall. “And we acknowledge the other significant factors that contribute to good health, including a culture that promotes healthy behaviors, and our nationally-recognized, high quality private health care systems. Furthermore, the State Legislature has been supportive of most of our programs, and last year appropriated a generous budget that gave us the resources we need to do our jobs.”

For a full copy of the United Health Foundation—America’s Health Rankings™ Report, visit www.americashealthrankings.org or www.unitedhealthfoundation.org.

###

The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.